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VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

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VICTORY AT YORKTOWN

The Story of the Last Campaign of the American Revolution by Joseph P. Cullen

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PROLOGUE

It began at Jamestown in 1607. It ended at Yorktown in 1781. One hundred and seventy-four years of hope, adventure, discovery, settlement, struggle, suffering, war, frustration, growth, development, that saw the country expand from a lonely settlement of 105 people in the small wilderness area on the banks of the James River into 13 colonies and 3 million people, of many races and beliefs, along the Atlantic seaboard, all governed and controlled by the mother country, England. It was an exciting chapter in British history, in American history, in world history, that closed in the little port town on the banks of the York River where it flows into Chesapeake Bay on its way to the ocean.

The end of a chapter, but not the end of the story. "There is nothing more common than to confound the terms American Revolution with those of the late American war," Benjamin Rush, the Philadelphia physician, said later. "The American war is over, but this is far from being the case with the American Revolution. On the contrary, but the first act of the great drama is closed."

And the drama continues today. The ideas that prompted the first successful colonial revolt in modern times against the parent country are as relevant now as they were then, and they are still evident in the quest for freedom, for self-determination, for change, for understanding and tolerance, for equality, by the peoples of the world.

The springboard needed to catapult those ideas worldwide was the victory of the French and American forces over the British at Yorktown, Va., on October 19, 1781—a victory that sealed independence for the Thirteen Colonies, cleared the way for the Constitution, and started America on the long road to becoming a world power.

Sprawled atop a high bluff along the banks of the York River overlooking a splendid harbor, the Town of York in the years just prior to the Revolution had the appearance and rough vitality of a thriving seaport. On the eastern outskirts, along the quiet waters of Wormley Creek, the water wheel of the Moore Plantation gristmill turned slowly, grinding grain and corn into edible meal. From the western end of town, the ferry plied its way across the half-mile narrow neck of the river to the village of Gloucester. Main Street, running parallel to the river, was busy with constant traffic as the colonists came to the county courthouse, a large T-shaped brick building, to record wills and deeds, and to see about the management of York County affairs. Here also were the jail and "other necessary instruments of justice," such as pillory and stocks, whipping post, and branding irons.

"The Taverns are many here, and much frequented," a visitor noted. Directly across the street from the courthouse stood the Swan Tavern, the best-known and most important in the town. In its pleasant rooms, merchants, planters, sea captains, traders, lawyers, shopkeepers, and travellers met and talked, conducted business or just relaxed at the card, billiard, or backgammon tables. A favorite drink was the mint julep, made with bright green mint fresh from the garden. On humid summer days the fragrant mint, with its delicate flavor and cooling quality, mixed with liquor and ice, provided a soothing refreshment. In the kitchen, meat and fowl trussed on spits turned slowly over a friendly fire with drip-pans on the floor to catch the juices. Bakestones, griddles, and ovens decorated the hearth, and big pots for boiling hung from cranes, with bellows nearby to breathe life into dying embers. On a rough, hand-hewn table stood mortar and pestle for mixing, flesh-hook for lifting meats, rolling pin, brass skimmer, and other cooking utensils, and an assortment of pans, tubs, pots, and trays.

Just off Main on Church Street stood Grace Church, another smaller T-shaped structure, built of marl. The bell in its steeple summoned worshippers and announced emergencies and celebrations. In addition to his sermons, the minister read public notices, the governor's proclamations, and important new laws. Sunday was "visiting day," as parishioners gathered in the church yard to discuss crops, the weather, prices, and politics.

Around these buildings the commercial and social life of the town centered. Here were the small shops of the craftsmen, the silversmiths and tailors, and storehouses and warehouses. Also along Main Street, the impressive frame houses and handsome brick mansions of some of the leading merchants and influential citizens, such as the Nelsons and the Digges, stood amid their outbuildings, neat fences, and tidy cultivated gardens. Some other houses on side streets were also substantial, such as this one advertised for sale in 1773: "The Dwelling-House is a very commodious one, with four rooms

above and four below, a very large Brick Store-house, a large and well cultivated garden, Stables, Kitchen, Wash House, &c. in good repair." A British visitor observed, "You perceive a great air of opulence amongst the inhabitants who have some of them built themselves houses equal in magnificence to many of our superb ones at St. James [in London]. . . . The most considerable houses are of brick; some handsome ones of wood . . . and the lesser sort of plaister."

Leading out from the town were two main roads: one northwest to nearby Williamsburg, capital of colonial Virginia; the other southeast to Hampton. Beyond the town the land was generally open, a soft, rolling countryside of marshes and fields for the most part.

Founded in 1691, Yorktown by the 1750s contained perhaps as many as 2,000 residents. Among these were planters, merchants, artisans, doctors, lawyers, shopkeepers, sailors, fishermen, laborers, indentured servants, and slaves. Tobacco, "the meat, drink, clothing, and money of the colonists," was the lifeblood of the community. From the surrounding area the planters sent their tobacco here to be inspected and exported. Great tobacco casks, weighing on the average 1,000 pounds, rolled through town and served as both containers and wheels since they had an axle through the center and shafts for the animals or slaves pulling them. Some planters shipped the "yellow weed" down river in small, light ships called shallops.

Other products—corn, wheat, beans, staves, beeswax—were brought here to be shipped to northern colonies, the Bahamas, West Indies, England, and Europe, in return for such commodities as carriages, household goods, clothing, wine and liquor, and farm implements. And from the West Indies and Africa came rum, molasses, sugar, ginger, salt, and slaves.

Three streets led from Main through sharp ravines down to the rough-and-tumble waterfront. Here under the bluff were wharves, warehouses, stores, modest homes, squalid huts, and rowdy grogshops and taverns frequented by sailors from many lands. Here large, three-masted schooners and sleek sloops from London, Glasgow, Amsterdam, Africa, and the West Indies crowded the harbor and vied for space with domestic ships and fishing boats. The haunting cries of the gulls pierced the babel of sound along the waterfront as clerks with ledgers in hand checked the cargoes, as slaves moved barrels and casks and crates to and from warehouses, and as planters, merchants, and ship captains haggled over prices, fees, and credit. And overall the heady aroma of rum, molasses, tobacco, fish, and ginger.

Yorktown's growth and prosperity reached their peak about 1750. The shops continued busy and the wharves full for, perhaps, another quarter of

a century. But with the outbreak of the Revolution in 1775, the town suffered a severe decline from which it never recovered. Many of its residents left, some from fear of possible military activity, others perhaps because they wished to remain loyal to the King, or at least wanted to stay neutral for the time being, and still others to join the army or navy. Early in the war, Virginia militia were ordered into the town to man a battery of artillery and to erect fortifications to command the harbor in case of attack. With no barracks in which to house themselves, the soldiers took advantage of the vacant dwellings, and the resultant neglect and abuse left the town a shambles. A visitor in 1777 described what he saw: "Houses burnt down, others pulled to pieces for fuel, most of the gardens thrown to the street, everything in disorder and confusion and no appearance of trade." Although there had been no British invasion and, as the years passed, it seemed as if the fighting might bypass Yorktown and Virginia, the picturesque little village was already a victim of the war.

II

The conflict that began at Lexington and Concord in April 1775 was a civil war. In America, many of the colonists were not in favor of independence. Those who remained loyal to the King, the Tories (or loyalists as they are called by historians), comprised a large group, possibly as many as one-third of the colonists. Thousands of them fought with British regiments, while others fled to Canada or England. In country towns and villages, the issue of independence sometimes pitted father against son and brother against brother. Many persons refused to sell supplies to the rebels for Continental dollars, but traded freely with the British for gold.

Even in England there was no unanimity of agreement on how the colonies should be treated. Some believed they should be allowed to go their own way peacefully. Many merchants were distraught at the interruption of their profitable trade, and their views were reflected in the British Parliament. "I cannot consent," one prominent member declared, "to the bloody consequences of so silly a contest about so silly an object from which we are likely to derive nothing but poverty, misery, disgrace, defeat and ruin." Even the military were not in agreement on the feasibility of conquering the rebellious colonies. Adj. Gen. Edward Harvey stated that "to conquer it [America] by our land forces is as wild an idea as ever contraverted common sense." And a surprisingly intelligent analysis of the situation was published in a London newspaper: "A country two thousand miles long . . .

intersected by rivers, passes, mountains, forests and marshes, where the conquest is . . . over the people, their affections, their hearts and their prejudices. . . . If conquest gives us the command of America we cannot keep it by force; the only possible plan is to burn and destroy it from one end to the other. . . ."

Despite such opposition, George III regarded the actions of the Americans as a threat to the principle of sovereignty, a threat that had to be erased to protect the British Empire. "I am clear as to one point," he told one of his ministers, "we must persist and not be dismayed by any difficulties that may arise on either side of the Atlantic. I know I am doing my duty and therefore can never wish to retract." And so the King prepared to dispatch the largest expeditionary force England had ever raised, including hired German soldiers, to fight a full-scale war 3,000 miles from home, the far-reaching results of which no one could foresee.

The King's decision that the colonies must be conquered and laid prostrate or surrender necessitated a drastic change in British strategy. Realizing that the policy of simply seizing towns and cities along the coast (made possible by the Royal Navy's control of the sea) or of burning towns and dispersing small bands of ragged rebels would not carry out the Crown's mandate, the British Government conceived a much-broader plan to divide the country and conquer it in big chunks in order to isolate the three general areas: the New England colonies, the middle colonies, and the southern colonies. Three large columns would accomplish this: one moving south from Canada, another sweeping north from the Carolinas, and the third thrusting through New York and Pennsylvania.

Basically it was a simple divide and conquer strategy—so simple, it seemed on paper at least, that it should have succeeded. But it had one fatal flaw. By the philosophy of warfare then in vogue, campaigns were not necessarily won by fighting battles, but by maneuvering, forcing the enemy to retreat by reason of unfavorable position, and capturing territories and cities. Armies were expensive to raise and took a long time to train; consequently, they were to be husbanded and preserved, not foolishly risked. This strategy of capturing cities and fortifications and territories rather than destroying armies had proved successful for the British in the French and Indian War in America. It was a strategy the British generals respected. They did not realize, and never did learn until it was too late, that the American rebellion was different from the conventional wars of the time. The only objective of the Americans was to establish political independence, not to conquer territories or armies; and the British never fully understood that so long as there was a rebel army in the field the war would go on regardless of what cities or territories they might control.

Fortunately for the American cause, Gen. George Washington understood this, and his whole war strategy was based on that principle. As he explained to the Continental Congress, "My answer is that our hopes are not placed in any particular city or spot of ground, but in preserving a good army, furnished with proper necessaries, to take advantage of favorable opportunities, and master and defeat the enemy piecemeal."

And so the conflict dragged on, year after year, with American victories few and infrequent, but with Washington still achieving his first objective, the preservation of his army. A frustrated British officer stated: "As we go forward into the country the rebels fly before us, and when we come back they always follow us. 'Tis almost impossible to catch them. They will neither fight, nor totally run away, but they keep at such a distance that we are always a day's march from them." Indeed, probably the closest Washington ever came to losing his army was not in any battle, but in the tragic winter encampments at Valley Forge in 1777-78 and Morristown in 1779-80, where the troops literally starved and many froze to death because Congress could not supply food and clothing and because many citizens, mostly loyalist in sympathy, were apathetic, or even hostile. In desperation Washington informed Congress: "I am now concerned that unless some great and capital change suddenly takes place, this army must inevitably be reduced to one or other of these three things: starve, dissolve, or disperse in order to obtain subsistence in the best manner they can." But somehow they survived hunger, suffering, disease, and desertions, and were held together by the magnetism of their general and the belief in their cause.

There had been one bright spot in all the frustration and despair. A large British force marching south from Canada had been defeated and captured by the Americans at Saratoga, N.Y., in the autumn of 1777. This was the most significant American victory so far, and one that was crucial for the American cause. When news of the British surrender reached Europe, the French, who had been secretly aiding the Americans with funds and supplies, decided early in 1778 to officially recognize American independence and openly send aid by entering into a treaty of amity and commerce. More important, they agreed to a treaty of alliance, to become effective should war break out between England and France. This was the foreign aid America needed to achieve independence. It meant more than money and supplies; when war was declared between England and France shortly after the treaty of alliance was signed, it meant French troops to fight on land and the French navy to contest British control of the sea.

Unable to mount a successful drive from Canada, and having failed in their efforts to control the middle colonies, the British had then gambled on a desperate effort in the southern colonies. The decision had been influ-

enced by a belief that a large force of loyalists would come to their support. This southern offensive was commanded by Lord Charles Cornwallis, and for a time it seemed as if it might prove successful. Savannah fell in December 1778 and most of Georgia came under British control. Charleston, S.C., was captured in May 1780 and with it Gen. Benjamin Lincoln's large American force of about 5,000 troops, the worst disaster suffered by the Americans in the entire war. Three months later at Camden, the defeat of Gen. Horatio Gates' patriot army thrust the Americans into what a later historian has called "a morass of trouble which seemed to have neither shore nor bottom." The way now seemed open for Cornwallis to march through the Carolinas and Virginia. But then things started to go wrong. The loyalist support did not materialize to the extent expected because of the American victories in South Carolina at King's Mountain (October 1780) and Cowpens (January 1781).

So, as the year 1781 began, the British, after more than 5 years of fighting and huge expenditures of funds, resources, and men, were no closer to crushing the revolt than they had been in the beginning. In fact, thanks to French aid, the Americans were slowly growing stronger. A French force of 5,000 men under the command of the Comte de Rochambeau was stationed at Newport, R.I. Washington, with less than 5,000 soldiers, was in the vicinity of New York City and New Jersey, keeping Gen. Sir Henry Clinton's force under observation. Gen. Nathanael Greene, who took over command of the southern force when Gates was relieved after Camden, was operating in the Carolinas and on March 15 attacked the British at Guilford Courthouse, N.C. In a desperately fought battle, Cornwallis finally won by turning his artillery on both British and American troops engaged in hand-to-hand fighting. But it was a costly victory for the British. Cornwallis suffered more than 500 casualties, about 25 percent of his force. As one English official put it, "Another such victory would destroy the British army."

Cornwallis felt this loss keenly. A humane man at heart, he respected his soldiers and had their well-being in mind. "His army is a family, he is the father," they said of him. But in his desire for popularity he was inclined at times to be unusually tolerant and too lenient in discipline. He allowed his troops to plunder and loot almost at will, thus gaining for himself a reputation for "Cruelty & inhumanity" and earning the undying hatred of many Americans.

Nevertheless, the aristocratic Earl was an able and experienced field commander, having fought in the Seven Years' War in Europe. A professional soldier since the age of 18, he now presented at 42 a handsome appearance, heavy-set but tall and erect, with a long, full face, straight nose, and

receding hairline. Lacking a sense of humor, he could at times be petty, vindictive, and stubborn, particularly in his personal animosities. Moreover, as was the general custom in the British army at the time, he was not above intriguing against his superiors in order to advance himself. His adversaries, however, respected his military ability. General Greene warned his fellow officers that they had "a modern Hannibal to deal with in the person of Lord Cornwallis."

Despite his victory at Guilford, which did not result in the destruction of the American force but only its withdrawal, Cornwallis fully realized that his campaign in the Carolinas had not really accomplished anything significant. The rebel force was still in the field and still largely intact. Also, after 5 years of unsuccessfully trying to suppress the revolt, he apparently was becoming tired and discouraged. "My present undertaking sits heavy on my mind," he informed Clinton, his superior in New York. "I have experienced the distresses and dangers of marching some hundreds of miles, in a country chiefly hostile, without one active or useful friend; without intelligence, and without communication with any part of the country." By implication, at least, he seemed to be chiding Clinton for lack of interest and communication. His orders from Clinton at the beginning of the campaign had been general in nature and left him much freedom in his choice of action. But Clinton did, apparently, expect him to operate only in the Carolinas and to maintain his base at Charleston. Now, however, in his depressed state of mind, Cornwallis suddenly made a fateful decision. He concluded that Virginia would have to be secured first before the Carolinas could be subdued. "I was most firmly persuaded," he later wrote, "that, *until* Virginia was reduced, we could not hold the more southern provinces, and that after its reduction, they would fall without much difficulty." Late in April he started his army northward.

When Cornwallis marched into Virginia, he in effect wrested the initiative from his commander and turned Virginia into a major theater of war, something Clinton did not yet want the area to become. His plan called for Cornwallis to subdue and hold the Carolinas, while he himself held New York, thus giving the British two major naval bases—New York City and Charleston—from which to operate. The British Government and the navy, however, wanted a third base in the Chesapeake Bay area, and Clinton intended to secure this with a small force. At a later date, after the

hot summer season, he might consider a thrust from here to subdue Virginia and possibly capture Philadelphia.

Clinton suspected, and rightly so, that Cornwallis was reporting not only to him but also to the home government and was, in a sense, defying him and intriguing for the top command. Of course, Clinton could have ordered his subordinate to return to the Carolinas, but that was not the character of the man. Although an excellent military planner, he lacked the self-confidence and inner assurance to promptly implement plans and make necessary decisions. And even though he now distrusted Cornwallis, he hesitated to take an action that might have political implications and thus endanger his own position.

An aristrocrat by birth, Clinton had advanced in the army primarily through his excellent connections, although he had served with distinction in the Seven Years' War. Physically unimpressive, short and paunchy, he was by nature quarrelsome and introverted, finding it difficult to make friends. As a young officer he described himself as being "a shy bitch." Now at the age of 51, he had changed little. Unable to command the respect of his peers, he became secretive, confiding in no one. Unwilling to work in cooperation with his colleagues, he developed a great capacity for feuding. As the top British commander in America he readily admitted that "I am hated—nay, detested—in this army." This attitude, coupled with his failure to take decisive action when needed, eventually led to an almost complete paralysis of command.

At this time a British force was already operating in Virginia. It was commanded by Benedict Arnold, the American turncoat who had failed earlier in his attempt to betray to the British the fort at West Point, N.Y. In January 1781 Arnold sacked and burned Richmond, encountering little opposition. The only active American force then in the State was a small group of raw militia commanded by the Prussian Gen. Friedrich Wilhelm Augustus von Steuben, whom the Congress had commissioned in 1778. A brilliant drillmaster and instructor, Steuben had joined the American army at Valley Forge and taught Washington's ragged band of rebels how to drill and march and maneuver efficiently, and how to use the bayonet to best advantage. In the course of his instruction, he had discovered that "The genius of this nation is not in the least to be compared with that of the Prussians, Austrians or French. You say to your soldier 'Do this' and he doeth it, but [to the Americans] I am obliged to say 'This is the reason why you ought to do that,' and then he does it." But although Steuben could train and inspire his Virginia militia, they were poorly armed and supplied because after 6 years of war Virginia was bankrupt, her paper currency worthless, her credit almost nonexistent. The officer commanding

the militia in the fortifications at Yorktown about this time reported: "The few men which I have here, considering their present condition as to cloathing are very insufficient to guard the Fort & Stores—There is not one of them that has either Shoes or Stock[in]gs & are miserably ragged in every other respect."

General Washington, aware of the conditions and anxious to defeat Arnold, dispatched about 1,200 of his best Continental troops to Virginia under the command of a 23-year-old French officer, the Marquis de Lafayette. General Clinton countered this move by sending 2,000 reinforcements from New York to join Arnold's force. Thus when Cornwallis reached Petersburg, about 25 miles south of Richmond, on May 20 and assumed command of all the British troops in the area, his army numbered something over 7,000—a powerful force with which he raided freely throughout Virginia, destroying stores and supplies and chasing the Virginia Assembly from Charlottesville where it had been meeting after the sacking of Richmond.

Lafayette, encamped near Richmond with his small force, was helpless to prevent these raids. He had to content himself with keeping the British under observation and reporting their moves to Washington. When Cornwallis pressed against him, Lafayette wisely retreated northward, but not too far. Fortunately for the American cause, he fully understood the necessity of keeping a force in the field and refusing the British an opportunity to destroy him. "Was I to fight a battle," he informed Washington, "I'll be cut to pieces, the militia dispersed, and the arms lost. Was I to decline fighting, the country would think herself given up. I am therefore determined to scarmish, but not to engage too far. . . . Was I anyways equal to the enemy, I would be extremely happy in my present command. But I am not strong enough even to get beaten."

With this report the young aristocrat showed that he fully understood Washington's strategy and that he could be safely entrusted with an independent command. He had mastered much of the art of military science in an amazingly short time. Commissioned a major general by Act of Congress at the age of 20, Lafayette had had no battle experience whatsoever when he reported to Washington in 1777. But he impressed the American commander with his attitude. When Washington apologized for the ragged appearance and loose discipline of his troops, Lafayette replied that "it is not to teach but to learn that I come hither." Washington then invited him to join his military family as an aide.

Temperamental and romantic but highly intelligent and imaginative with the ability to learn by experience, Lafayette became Washington's star

pupil. His lack of military knowledge actually proved an advantage as he did not have to unlearn the conventional European methods of warfare. Unlike many foreign officers, he quickly realized that despite the unorthodox appearance and methods of the American army and its commander, they were effective in this unconventional war. And in this learning process a strong bond of friendship and love, akin to a father-and-son relationship, developed between the childless American general and the prominent member of the French Court who had been orphaned at the age of three. Without exaggeration, Lafayette wrote his wife that Washington "finds in me a sincere friend, in whose bosom he may always confide his most secret thoughts and who will always speak the truth." And Washington spoke of him as "the man I love."

In his Virginia operations, Lafayette exhibited a military skill and understanding that showed Washington's trust had not been misplaced. Cornwallis followed him for awhile but soon tired of the chase, despite his boast that "The boy cannot escape me." The hot and humid Virginia summer weather had set in, and the British troops had been marching and fighting for more than 6 months. They desperately needed rest. Cornwallis realized that Lafayette was not going to stand and fight and he wanted to establish a base on the coast where he could be supplied and reinforced. So he retreated east through Richmond and down the Peninsula to Williamsburg, burning crops and tobacco warehouses, picking up loyalists who wanted protection, and capturing slaves. " 'Tis said that 2 or 3000 Negroes march in their train," an American reported. Lafayette, joined by Steuben's ragged militia and another force sent by Washington under Gen. Anthony Wayne, followed closely at his heels. The Americans now numbered about 4,500, a respectable force, and Lafayette believed he could safely stay close to the British, although still not strong enough to attack.

When Cornwallis reached Williamsburg he received some disturbing news. Clinton, convinced that Washington and the French troops under Rochambeau in Rhode Island were going to unite and besiege him in New York, ordered Cornwallis to ship 2,000 men north for the defense of the city. Cornwallis interpreted this order as further criticism of his move into Virginia, but it had to be obeyed nevertheless. He decided that Portsmouth would be best for embarking the troops and on the morning of July 4 put his army in motion for Jamestown, where he would cross the James.

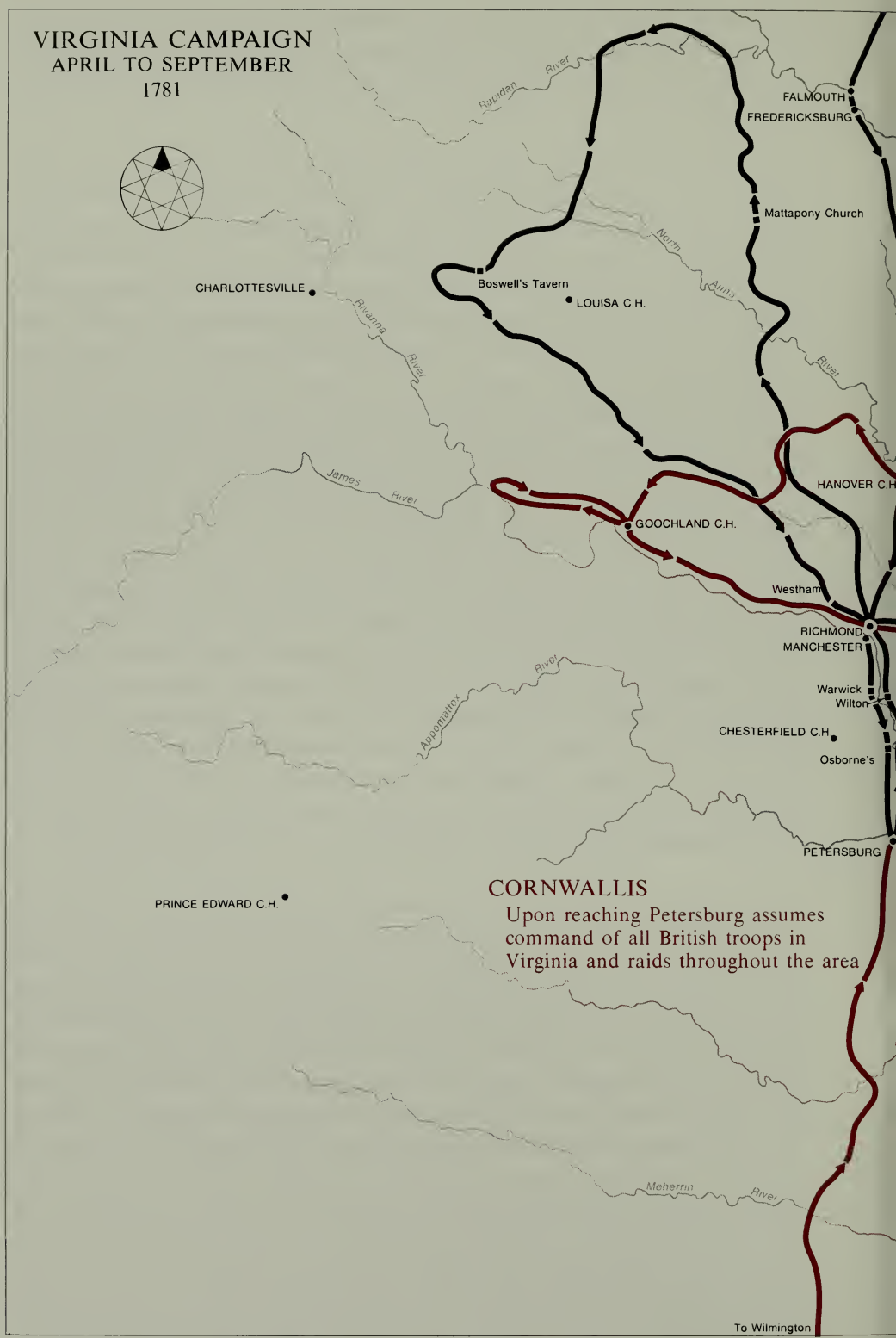
But he also set a trap for the young Lafayette. By various means he conveyed the impression that the bulk of his army had crossed the river on the 5th and 6th, leaving just a rear guard exposed on the north bank. In fact, the reverse was true. Lafayette rose to the bait. On the 6th he ordered General Wayne and his Pennsylvania troops forward to attack the sup-

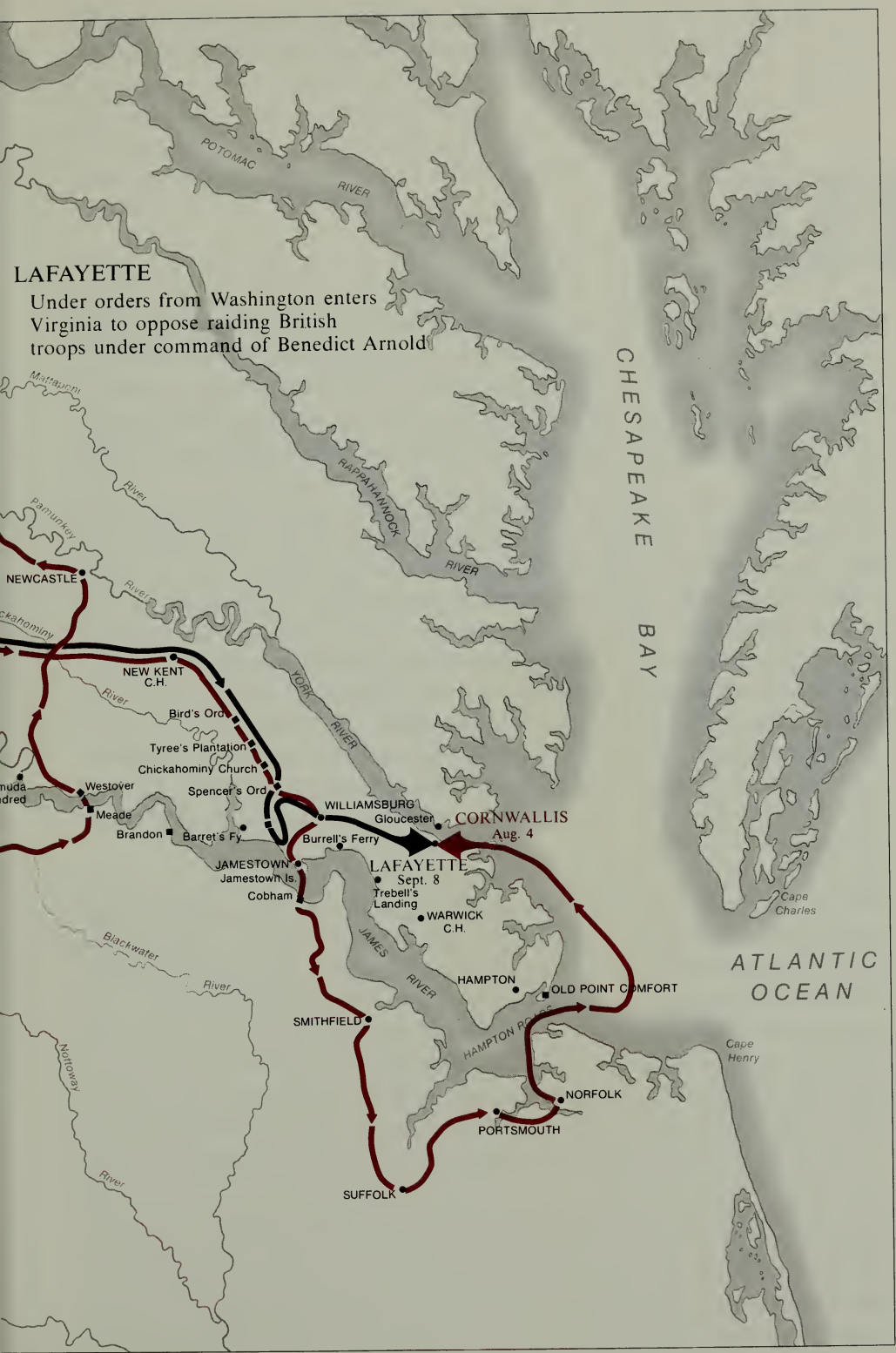
posed British rear guard. Still very conscious of his responsibility to preserve his command, Lafeyette rode ahead on a personal reconnaissance. Quickly realizing the true situation, he hurried back in a futile attempt to halt the attack.

Wayne, with less than a thousand men, had come up against almost the entire British army at Green Spring, the home of one-time Governor Sir William Berkeley, just a few miles west of Williamsburg. Characterized by Washington as being "More active & enterprising than Judicious & cautious," Wayne now faced what he called "a choice of difficulties." He could try to retreat quickly, risking panic and annihilation; he could stand and fight, which probably would be equally disastrous; or he could attack. And attack he did! The daring move surprised the British, who halted in confusion. Cornwallis, now uncertain about the size of the force in his front, needed time to reorganize. And Wayne, taking advantage of the temporary state of confusion and the approaching darkness, skillfully withdrew his men without further damage and rejoined the main force. He suffered about 145 casualties, the British 75.

Lafayette praised the conduct of the Pennsylvania officers for their "gallantry and talents," but one of the soldiers involved called it "Madness! Mad A-----y, by G--, I never knew such a piece of work heard of—about eight hundred troops opposed to five or six thousand veterans upon their own ground." This was an important action for the Americans as it raised the morale of Lafayette's whole force and heightened their hopes for victory. A small number of them had faced virtually the whole British army and had not panicked and run; and these were the same troops who just 6 months earlier, had mutinied when they were not paid or fed decently.

Having failed to spring his trap, Cornwallis continued on to Portsmouth unmolested. But before he could ship the requested troops to New York, he received a series of confusing and vacillating letters from Clinton. Clinton seemed to be having a difficult time deciding whether he wanted the troops in New York or Philadelphia or Virginia. In truth, it appears that he simply did not know what to do with Cornwallis' army. And Cornwallis, having lost his offensive capabilities, wanted to return to South Carolina. He was now afraid that a strictly defensive position in Virginia would accomplish little and that he would be blamed. To buttress his own position, he wrote a political friend in England "that the C[ommander] is determined to throw all blame on me & to disapprove of all I have done. . . ." But Clinton had never wanted Cornwallis in Virginia to begin with; that decision had been Cornwallis' alone. Finally, on June 20, Clinton, acting under pressure from the home government and the British navy, ordered Cornwallis to secure a defensive post with a protected anchorage for the


VIRGINIA CAMPAIGN
APRIL TO SEPTEMBER
1781
Rapidan River
FALMOUTH
FREDERICKSBURG
Mattapony Church
North Anna River
Boswell's Tavern
LOUISA C.H.
CHARLOTTESVILLE
Rivanna River
James River
HANOVER C.H.
GOOCHLAND C.H.
Westham
RICHMOND
MANCHESTER
Warwick
Wilton
Appomattox River
CHESTERFIELD C.H.
Osborne's
PETERSBURG
PRINCE EDWARD C.H.
CORNWALLIS
Upon reaching Petersburg assumes command of all British troops in Virginia and raids throughout the area
Meherrin River
To Wilmington


LAFAYETTE
Under orders from Washington enters Virginia to oppose raiding British troops under command of Benedict Arnold
POTOMAC
RIVER
CHESAPEAKE
BAY
RAPPAHANNOCK
RIVER
Mattaponi
River
Pamunkey
River
NEWCASTLE
NEW KENT C.H.
River
Bird's Ord
Tyree's Plantation
Chickahominy Church
Westover
Meade
Brandon
Barret's Fy
Spencer's Ord
YORK
RIVER
WILLIAMSBURG
Gloucester
CORNWALLIS
Aug. 4
Burrell's Ferry
JAMESTOWN
Jamestown Is.
Cobham
LAFAYETTE
Sept. 8
Trebell's Landing
WARWICK C.H.
JAMES
RIVER
HAMPTON
OLD POINT COMFORT
SMITHFIELD
HAMPTON ROADS
NORFOLK
PORTSMOUTH
SUFFOLK
Cape Charles
Cape Henry
ATLANTIC
OCEAN
Blackwater
River
Nottoway
River

fleet, suggesting Point Comfort in Hampton Roads. Cornwallis, however, decided to occupy and fortify Yorktown and Gloucester instead. The fateful move was made early in August.

IV

While Cornwallis and Lafayette sparred in Virginia, Washington had been planning to attack the British in New York with the aid of the French. To effect this, he met with the French commander Rochambeau in May at Wethersfield in Connecticut. To an impartial observer they must have presented a striking contrast, both in appearance and background. The 55-year-old count was short and stocky, with a ruddy complexion on a rather long, fleshy face with a scar on his forehead, and a slight limp that attested to the 38 years he had spent in the army. Concerned only with military affairs, he was brisk and efficient in manner, wasting neither words nor time. And Washington, standing [illegible]er 6 feet tall and weighing about 200 pounds, big-boned with a [illegible]road face, jutting jaw, blue-gray eyes set in deep sockets, whose b[illegible]as now rapidly turning gray at age 49, was a citizen-soldier ar[illegible]se only real military experience prior to the Revolution had [illegible]rs on the frontier during the French and Indian War. Gra[illegible] he seemed to speak more from necessity than desire, a[illegible] lack of formal education. Yet they had a few traits in [illegible]ere aloof yet gracious, affable but never familiar.

Fortunately, both al[illegible]atic ability and each realized they would have to work [illegible]ucceed. Rochambeau had laid the groundwork for this [illegible]ip with his first letter to Washington after his arrival [illegible]of the King, my master, place me under the orders of [illegible] I come, wholly obedient and with the zeal and the vene[illegible]e for you and for the remarkable talents you have display[illegible] a war which will always be memorable." Washington, on h[illegible]stute enough, despite his authority, not to give orders to the Fre[illegible]uggested plans and actions and if Rochambeau agreed they w[illegible] carried out. And most important, the American made an excelle[illegible]pression on the French officers. "He looks like a hero," wrote one, "he is very cold and says little but he is frank and polite." Others remarked on how "his dignified address, the simplicity of his manners and mild gravi[illegible] surpassed our expectation and won every heart," and how "In his priva[illegible] conduct he preserves that polite and atten-

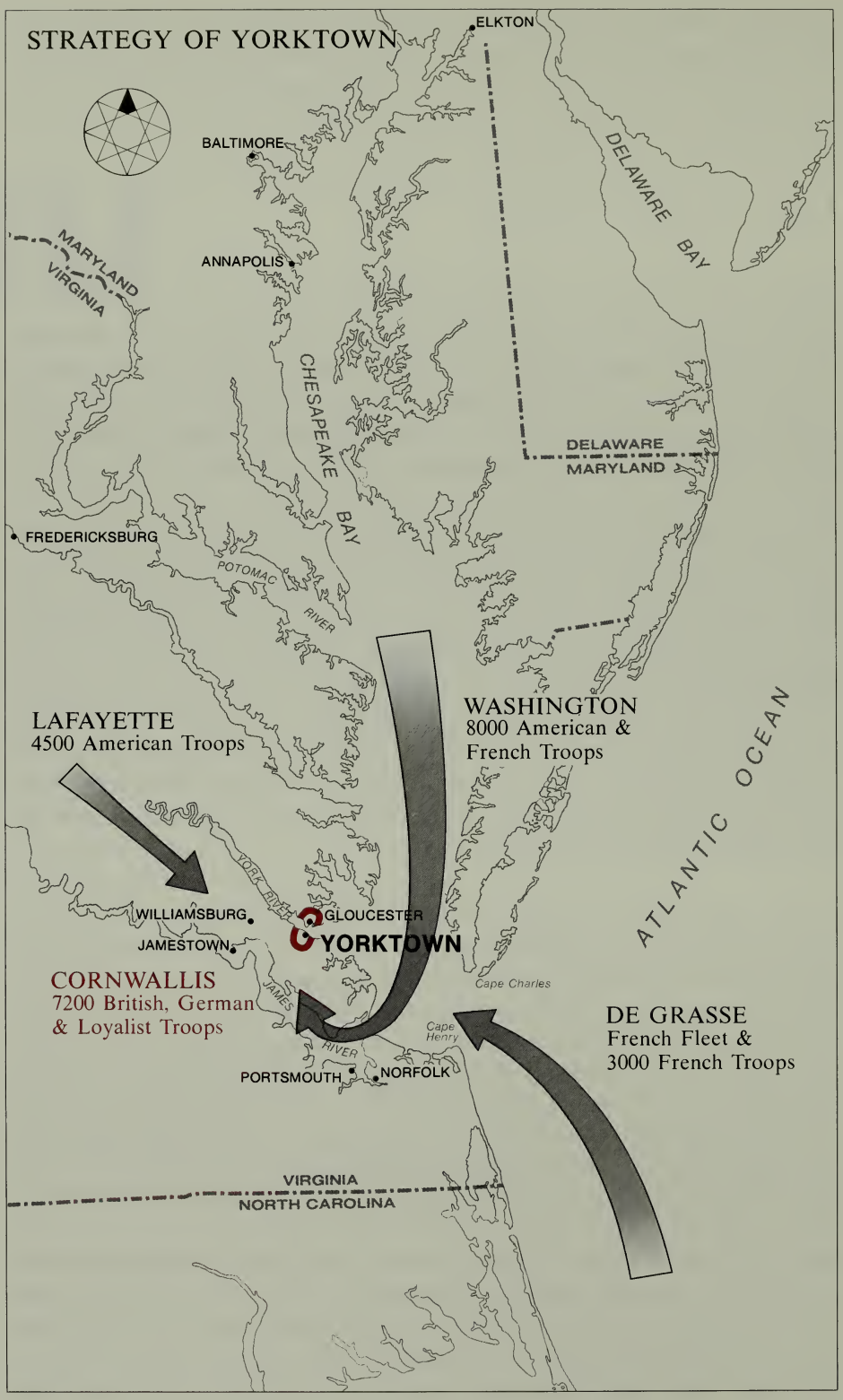
tive good breeding which satisfies everybody and offends no one. He is a foe to ostentation and to vainglory." Years later another officer summed up succinctly the relationship between the two generals when he wrote of Rochambeau: "He seemed to have been purposely created to understand Washington and to be understood by him. . . ." This, of course, was in sharp contrast to the situation existing between the two top British commanders, Clinton and Cornwallis.

From Rochambeau the Americans now learned that a French fleet commanded by the Comte de Grasse had sailed from France for the West Indies and should be off the American coast by mid-summer. This was good news indeed, for Washington proposed to use the fleet in his plan to attack Clinton in New York. Rochambeau, however, was cool to the idea and would not commit himself. In the meantime, he did agree to move his troops from Rhode Island and join the Americans in front of New York.

When the French arrived outside the city in the first week of July, they made their first real acquaintance with the American soldiers and were a little startled at what they saw. "As yet," wrote one Frenchman, the Abbé Robin, "they have no regulation uniform, only perhaps the officers and some of the artillery. . . . Hardly any of them have a mattress. One blanket spread out over branches and the bark of trees serves their officers as a bed." Nevertheless, there was something impressive about these "ragged Continentals." "It is incredible," another Frenchman wrote, "that soldiers composed of men of every age, even of children of fifteen, of whites and blacks, almost naked, unpaid, and rather poorly fed, can march so well and withstand fire so steadfastly."

On the other hand, the Americans were awed by the fancy white uniforms of the French, with the different regiments identified by various colored lapels, collars, and buttons. Two regiments even had plumes. But if the uniforms were impressive, they were not very practical in the brutal American heat, as one French officer noted. "We . . . suffered terribly on our Journey with the excessive heat of the country . . . . More than 400 soldiers dropped down, unable to march further . . . ." The Abbé Robin felt that "The great advantage of suitable clothing was not sufficiently appreciated in France. There one has sacrificed too much to appearances. One has there forgotten that troops are intended for action and not for show."

With the two forces now joined in front of New York, Washington made preparations to attack when the French fleet should arrive. But on August 14 Admiral de Barras, who commanded the small French fleet off Rhode Island that had transported the French troops, sent word that de Grasse had sailed from the West Indies headed for Chesapeake Bay, not New


STRATEGY OF YORKTOWN
ELKTON
BALTIMORE
ANNAPOLIS
MARYLAND
VIRGINIA
DELAWARE BAY
CHESAPEAKE BAY
DELAWARE
MARYLAND
FREDERICKSBURG
POTOMAC RIVER
LAFAYETTE
4500 American Troops
WASHINGTON
8000 American &
French Troops
ATLANTIC OCEAN
YORK RIVER
WILLIAMSBURG
GLOUCESTER
YORKTOWN
JAMESTOWN
CORNWALLIS
7200 British, German
& Loyalist Troops
JAMES RIVER
Cape Charles
Cape Henry
DE GRASSE
French Fleet &
3000 French Troops
PORTSMOUTH
NORFOLK
VIRGINIA
NORTH CAROLINA

York. "Matters having now come to a crisis," Washington wrote, "I was obliged . . . to give up all idea of attacking New York." Instead, he and Rochambeau agreed to march southward to join Lafayette and, in conjunction with the fleet, try to trap Cornwallis at Yorktown. Although Washington could not be called a quick thinker in military affairs, when he decided on a course of action he generally executed it with vigor and without hesitation. And so it was now. The Americans moved out promptly, followed by the French, after feinting toward New York to try to keep Clinton off balance.

Only Washington and Rochambeau knew the army's destination, but, as in all armies from time immemorial, rumors as to the objective were rife in the ranks. "Bets have run high on one side," wrote a Pennsylvania surgeon, "that we are to . . . aid in the siege of New York, and on the other that we are . . . actually destined to Virginia in pursuit of the army under Lord Cornwallis." The latter collected their bets when the army took the road to Philadelphia. Early in September they marched through the city, raising "a dust like a smothering mountain . . . ." The soldiers marched in slow and solemn step, regulated by the drum and fife. In the rear followed "a great number of wagons, loaded with tents, provisions and other baggage, such as a few soldiers' wives and children . . . ."

On September 5, outside Philadelphia, a courier reached Washington with the news that the French fleet had arrived in Chesapeake Bay, and with it another 3,000 soldiers. Washington, usually calm and composed, was noticeably delighted. "I caught sight of General Washington," wrote Rochambeau, "waving his hat at me with demonstrative gestures of the greatest joy." And another officer noted: "For the moment he put aside his character as arbiter of North America and contented himself with that of a citizen happy beyond measure at the good fortune of his country."

That same afternoon Cornwallis' fate was sealed, although Washington could not know it. Admiral de Grasse had arrived August 31, after evading the British fleet sent to block him, and landed French troops at Jamestown Island on September 5. Then the British fleet under Adm. Thomas Graves hove into sight and de Grasse promptly stood out to sea to engage it. Graves had 19 ships-of-the-line (battleships of the 18th century) totalling 1,400 guns, as opposed to de Grasse's 24 ships and 1,700 guns. The action began shortly after 4 p.m. Less than 3 hours later it was over, with the French having the advantage. Several of the British ships were damaged severely enough to be put out of action.

For the next few days both fleets maneuvered without making contact. Then on the 11th, after burning one of his damaged vessels, Graves made a

disastrous decision for Cornwallis and the British. "I then determined," he reported, "to proceed with the fleet to New York . . . and use every possible means for putting the Ships into the best State for Service." On September 14th Graves left for New York. As a later naval historian wrote: "He had lost no engagement, no ships . . . . He had merely lost America." De Grasse then sailed back to the Chesapeake. Cut off by sea, Cornwallis was doomed. With the additional 3,000 French troops, commanded by the Marquis de Saint Simon, Lafayette's force now about equalled Cornwallis', thus closing the land escape route. And while Graves had been busy with de Grasse, the small French fleet from Rhode Island under de Barras had slipped in behind him, bringing the vital heavy artillery necessary for a successful siege.

Washington and Rochambeau reached the Allied headquarters in Williamsburg on September 14, causing much excitement and rejoicing, particularly among the French officers who were anxious to meet the American leader. Some Pennsylvania troops were paraded in their honor and then, an observer noted, "The whole army and all the town were presently in motion . . . men, women, and children seemed to vie with each other in demonstrations of joy and eagerness to see their beloved countryman." Later that afternoon the Marquis de Saint Simon gave a sumptuous reception for all officers. "To add to the happiness of the evening," one officer reported, "an elegant band of music played an introductive part of a French opera, signifying the happiness of the family when blessed with the presence of their father, and their great dependence upon him."

By the 26th Washington's whole force, French and American for a total of about 16,000 men, was concentrated in front of Williamsburg. Wasting no time, the next day he issued marching orders for the 28th. "If the enemy should be tempted to meet the army on its march," the order stated, "the General particularly enjoins the troops to place their principal reliance on the bayonet, that they may prove the vanity of the boast which the British make of their peculiar prowess in deciding battles with that weapon. . . . The justice of the cause in which we are engaged, and the honor of the two Nations, must inspire every breast with sentiments that are the presage of victory."

Promptly at 5 o'clock on the cool, dark morning of September 28, the Allied force, with the Americans leading off, moved out on the 11-mile march to Yorktown. The men sensed victory, and an air of excitement and expectancy prevailed. "We prepared to move down and pay our old acquaintance, the British at Yorktown, a visit," a Massachusetts sergeant recorded. "I doubt not but their wish was not to have so many of us come at once, as their accommodations were rather scanty." About noon contact

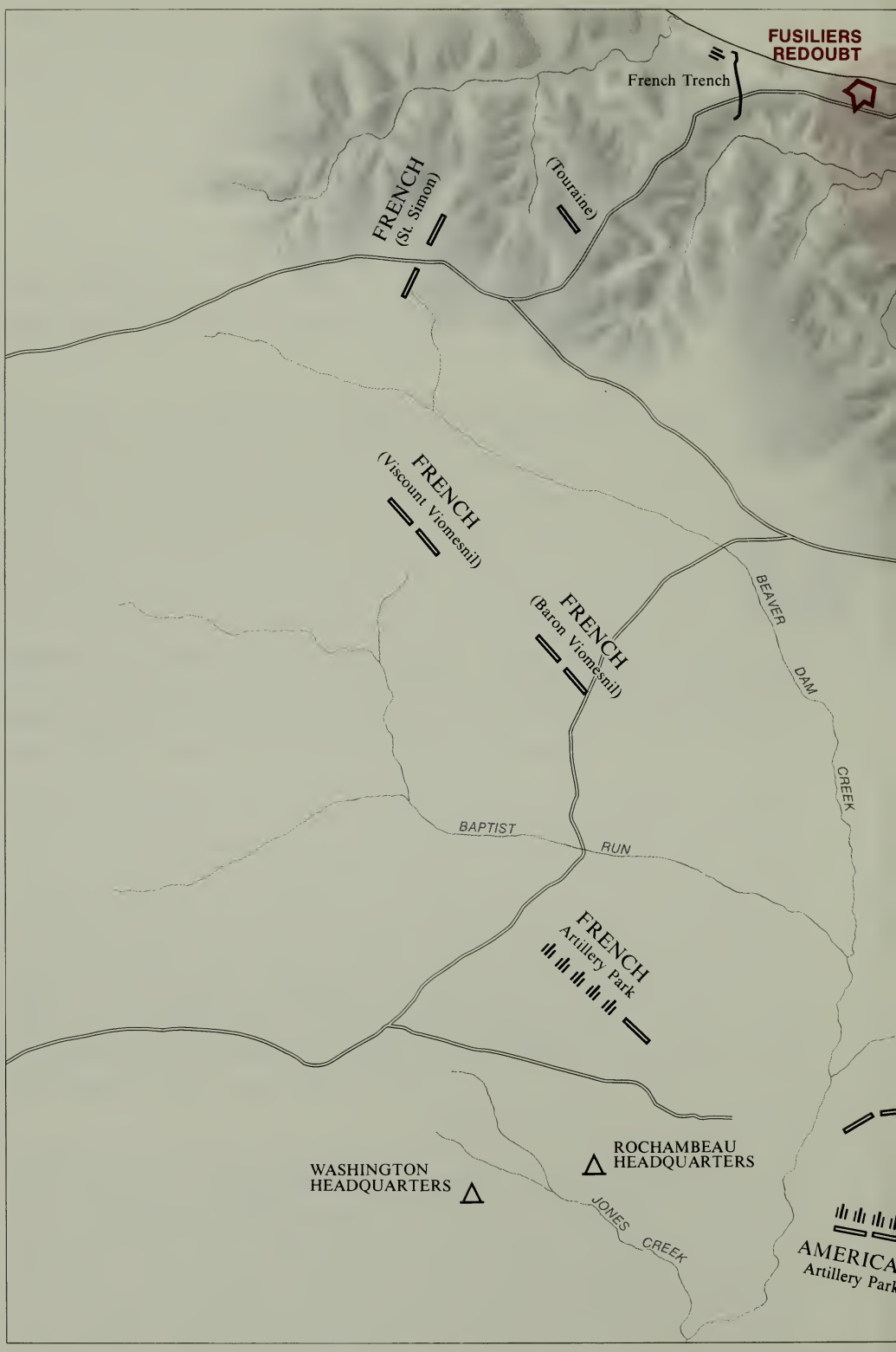
was made with the British pickets. "The enemy on our approach made some shew [sic] of opposition from their cavalry, but upon bringing up some field pieces and making a few shot, they retire," an American officer reported. That night the Allied army formed a line from the York River to Beaverdam Creek, about a mile from the British outposts. To guard against a surprise attack, Washington ordered "The whole army" to "lay on their arms this night."

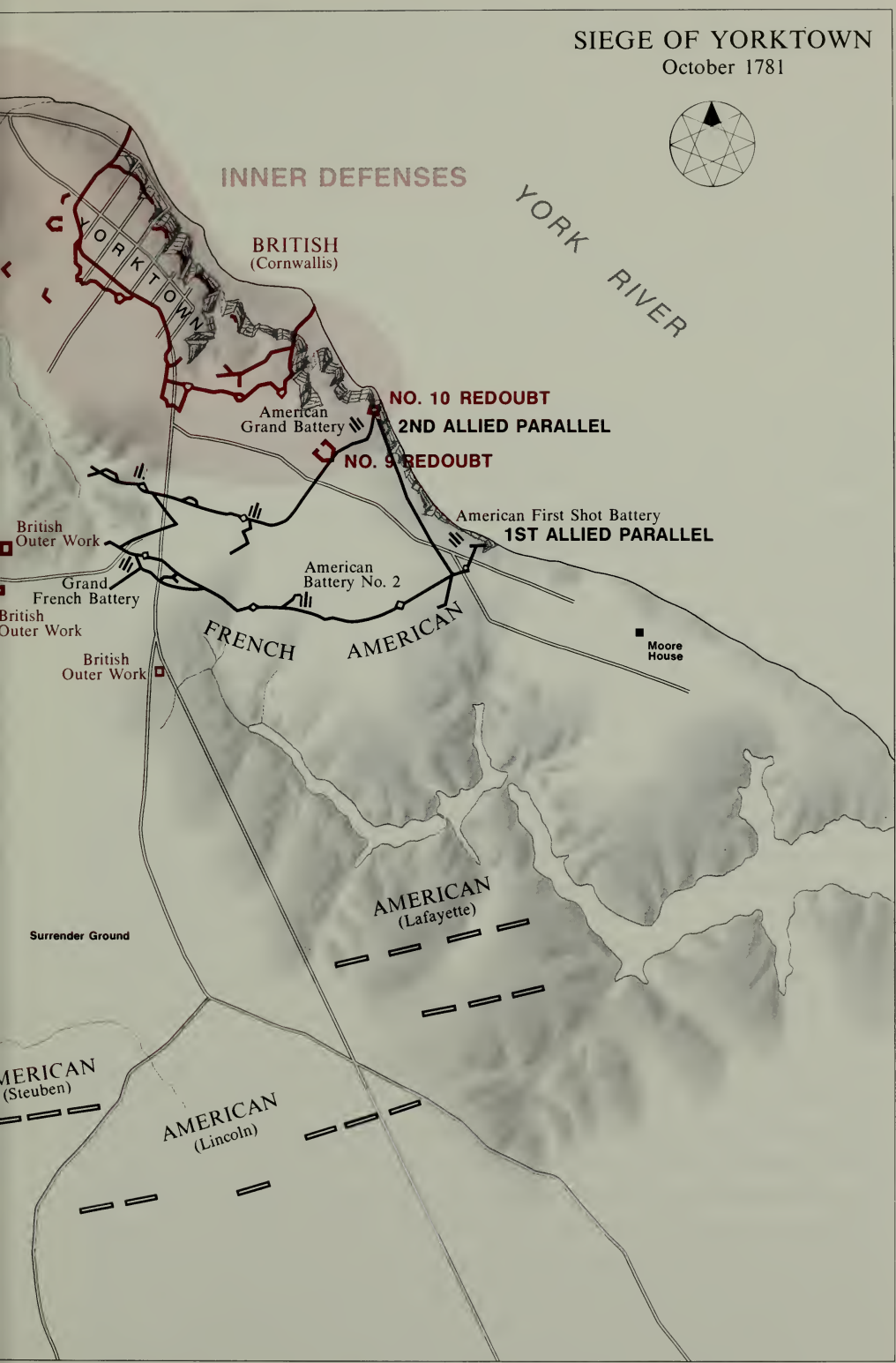
The next day, September 29, the Americans moved to the right (east) of the creek, and it became the dividing line between the French and American forces. Now the supply officers were requested to furnish "straw, good bread, and one gill of rum per man daily."

The last phase of the war was about to begin.

Despite the presence of the French fleet and the Allied land forces, Cornwallis was extremely confident of his ability to hold out. "I have ventured these last two days to look General Washington's whole force in the face in the position outside my works," he informed Clinton, "and I have the pleasure to assure Your Excellency that there was but one Wish throughout the whole Army, which was, that the Enemy would advance." Outnumbered two to one and blocked on the sea by the French fleet, this bravado seemed unjustified. But Cornwallis had recently received a dispatch from Clinton assuring him that a British fleet with an additional 5,000 soldiers would sail from New York to his relief about October 5, and he believed Washington to be without heavy siege artillery. On the basis of these erroneous assumptions he decided on September 29 to abandon his outer fortifications and withdraw to an inner defense line in and around Yorktown. "I shall retire this night within the works and have no doubt, if relief comes in time, York and Gloucester will be both in the possession of his Majesty's troops."

This inner defense system, although not yet completed, was still fairly formidable. An entrenched line including small enclosed earthworks, or redoubts, and artillery, extended in a semi-circle from the York River on the northwest of the town back to the river on the southeast. On Cornwallis' right (northwest) flank the line was anchored by a large star-shaped earthwork, manned by troops from the Royal Welsh Fusiliers Regiment and


FUSILIERS REDOUBT
French Trench
FRENCH (St. Simon)
(Touraine)
FRENCH (Viscount Viomesnil)
FRENCH (Baron Viomesnil)
BEAVER DAM CREEK
BAPTIST RUN
FRENCH Artillery Park
ROCHAMBEAU HEADQUARTERS
WASHINGTON HEADQUARTERS
JONES CREEK
AMERICA
Artillery Park


SIEGE OF YORKTOWN
October 1781
INNER DEFENSES
YORK RIVER
YORKTOWN
BRITISH
(Cornwallis)
NO. 10 REDOUBT
American
Grand Battery
2ND ALLIED PARALLEL
NO. 9 REDOUBT
American First Shot Battery
1ST ALLIED PARALLEL
British
Outer Work
Grand
French Battery
British
Outer Work
American
Battery No. 2
FRENCH
AMERICAN
British
Outer Work
Moore
House
AMERICAN
(Lafayette)
Surrender Ground
MERICAN
(Steuben)
AMERICAN
(Lincoln)

the Marines, and was called the Fusiliers Redoubt. Further protection was afforded by Yorktown Creek and surrounding marshland, formidable obstacles to any attacking force. Anchoring the British left (southeast) flank were two strong positions, Redoubts Nos. 9 and 10, just in advance of the main line. A small force under Lt. Col. Banastre Tarleton was also entrenched across the river in the village of Gloucester. Between the two points were transports, supply ships, and some armed vessels.

Work on the British fortifications had proceeded slowly. But then, with the arrival of the besieging forces, everything changed. "Cornwallis employs his army night and day in fortifying York and Gloucester," an American officer noted. "He has drawn up his ships to the shore, moored them head and stern, landed their guns, and cut up their sails for tents, and has given orders to burn or sink them on the first attack." Houses and trees within a half-mile radius of town were demolished to clear a line of fire and to provide lumber for use in the fortifications. "The Enemy have pull'd down almost every Wooden House in Town & I suppose we shall knock down every Brick one," lamented another officer.

Even before the start of the actual siege, Cornwallis was low on military provisions. The long campaign he had conducted before reaching Yorktown had depleted his arms and ammunition, and the hundreds of refugees, loyalists and others, in addition to the many "negroes that are employed in different branches of the public service," reduced his food supply at an alarming rate. "We get terrible provisions now," a German soldier reported, "putrid ships' meat and wormy biscuits that have spoiled on the ships." This, combined with hard labor in the humid heat, poor drinking water, and crowded conditions, resulted in much sickness in the British camp. "Many of the men have taken sick here," the same soldier wrote, "with dysentery or the bloody flux and with diarrhea. Also the foul fever is spreading, partly on account of the many hardships from which one has little rest day or night, and partly on account of the awful food; but mostly, the nitre-bearing water is to blame for it."

Cornwallis' action in abandoning his outer defenses surprised Washington and Rochambeau, but it was a pleasant surprise. The ground given up was a plateau about a half-mile wide between Wormley Creek on the southeast and Yorktown Creek on the northwest. "On the 30th," wrote Washington, "we discovered that the enemy had evacuated all their exterior works, and withdrawn themselves to those near the town. By this means we are in possession of very advantageous grounds, which command their line of works in a very near advance." The Allies promptly occupied the abandoned positions. The position of the American wing now stretched from the York River to Beaverdam Creek, and was commanded by Gen. Benjamin Lin-

coln. Under him the regular Continentals (including a regiment of Canadian volunteers) were commanded by Generals Lafayette and von Steuben, and the militia by Gen. Thomas Nelson, a onetime Yorktown resident. Gen. Henry Knox was responsible for the artillery. The French wing, commanded by Rochambeau, stretched from Beaverdam Creek to the York on the northwest. The whole Allied army thus formed a semicircle around Cornwallis. In addition, a French force under Gen. Claude-Gabriel, Marquis de Choisy, was ordered to Gloucester to contain the British in their entrenchments there. While these moves were being made, the French attacked the Fusiliers Redoubt on the British right but were driven back. They did, however, secure a more advantageous position in this section of the line.

After a careful and thorough reconnaissance, the French engineers assured Washington that his position and the topography were ideally suited for the construction of trenches, or siege lines, to cover the troops and the batteries of artillery. As the approach to the British right was obstructed by marshes and Yorktown Creek, Washington and Rochambeau decided to concentrate on the enemy left and center. Lacking experience in this type of operation, the Americans gratefully took instructions and supervision from the French engineer officers on Washington's staff, and for this cooperation Rochambeau praised the Americans. "We must render them the justice to say they comported themselves with a zeal, a courage, and with a spirit of emulation which never left them behind in any duty with which they were charged although they were strangers to the operation of a siege." The French seemed unusually optimistic, so Washington took this opportunity to remind his troops that "The present moment offers, in prospect, the epoch which will decide American Independence, the glory and superiority of the allies . . . . The liberties of America, and the honor of the Allied Arms are in our hands."

A siege is like putting a rope around someone's neck and slowly drawing it tight until the person either gives up or strangles to death. And so it was here. A period of hard, brutal labor for the "pick-and-shovel soldiers" to prepare the siege lines and drag up the heavy artillery and ammunition and other supplies. As one rebel put it, "We had holed him and nothing remained but to dig him out." For 10 days and nights they labored, and always under enemy fire. A German soldier reported that "we fired at them [the Americans] continually this whole time both by day as well as by night, with cannon, bombs, and howitzers; but they labored on notwithstanding at their works." And as always in every army that ever was, there had to be a clown around somewhere. "A militia man this day," an officer noted, "possessed of more bravery than prudence, stood constantly on the parapet and d----d his soul if he would dodge for the buggers. He had es-

caped longer than could have been expected, and growing foolhardy, brandished his spade at every ball that was fired till, unfortunately, a ball came and put an end to his capers."

In the siege warfare of that day, the attacking army did not open fire when only one battery was in position because the besieged could concentrate all their guns on that one target. The firing was begun only after a series of batteries had been positioned. Thus it was not until October 9 that the Allies were ready to open fire. Proudly the white flags of France and the Continental standard appeared over the parapets. "I confess I felt a secret pride swell my heart," a soldier remembered, "when I saw the 'star-spangled banner' waving majestically in the very faces of our implacable adversaries; it appeared like an omen of success to our enterprize, and so it proved in reality."

About 3 o'clock a French battery on the left, opposite the Fusiliers Redoubt, opened fire. A few hours later an American battery on the right opened up and the first gun "was fired by the Commander-in-Chief, who was designedly present in the battery for the express purpose of putting the first match." A British soldier in Yorktown wrote that now "Most of the inhabitants who were still to be found here fled with their best possessions eastward to the bank of the York River, and dug in among the sand cliffs, but there also they did not stay undamaged." And Cornwallis reported that "The fire continued incessant from heavy cannon and from mortars and howitzers, throwing shells from eight to sixteen inches, until all our guns on the left were silenced, our work much damaged, and our loss of men considerable." That night of October 9, the French, firing hot-shot, set fire to several of the British ships in the harbor, and the doomed town appeared as an eerie silhouette against the roaring flames.

On the morning of the 10th the French Grand Battery of 14 guns on the left began to fire, as more American artillery opened up on the right. Lafayette, officer of the day in that sector, invited General Nelson to aim the guns. One of the leading merchants of Yorktown before the war, Nelson had recently been elected Governor of Virginia. He had served in the Continental Congress and was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence. In 1779 he had organized the Virginia militia he now commanded. When Lafayette asked for a target, Nelson pointed to an impressive brick mansion. "There, to that house," he said. "It is mine . . . and is the best one in the town." Because it was the best, he thought it was probably being used as Cornwallis' headquarters.

The bombardment continued night and day, and by October 11 fifty-two pieces of artillery were raining death and destruction on Yorktown. "I

have more than once," wrote a Pennsylvania surgeon, "witnessed fragments of mangled bodies and limbs of British soldiers thrown into the air by the bursting of our shells." Inside the town an officer noted that "the bombs and cannon balls hit many inhabitants and negroes of the city, and marines, and soldiers. One saw men lying nearly everywhere who were mortally wounded and whose heads, arms, and legs had been shot off." Cornwallis, it was reported, had "built a kind of grotto . . . where he lives underground." Yet there were those who would willingly risk life or limb for the price of a drink. "When a shell would fall on any hard place, so that it would not go under the ground, a soldier would go out to it and knock off the fiz, or neck, and then it would not burst. The soldier then received a shilling for the act. They said that they did not care much about their life, but that the shilling would buy spirits!"

Despite the horror and suffering, the bombardment had a certain awe-inspiring fascination, particularly at night. "The bombshells from the besiegers and the besieged are incessantly crossing each other's path in the air," one participant noted. "They are clearly visible in the form of a black ball in the day, but in the night they appear like a fiery meteor with a blazing tail, most beautifully brilliant, ascending majestically from the mortar to a certain altitude and gradually descending to the spot where they are destined to execute their work of destruction . . . . When a shell falls, it whirls round, burrows, and excavates the earth to a considerable extent, and bursting, makes dreadful havoc around. . . ."

Under the devastating Allied barrage, the British guns were gradually being knocked out of action. Cornwallis, who had not expected to be besieged with heavy artillery and consequently was not prepared for it, knew now that he could not hold out long. And then he received a most disheartening dispatch from Clinton stating that he did not know when the British fleet would be ready to sail. In his reply Cornwallis warned Clinton that he could not "hope to make a very long resistance."

With the slackening of British fire the time had now come for the Allies to undertake the most hazardous part of the siege—construction of a second line to bring them within 1,000 feet of the enemy and enable them to launch an assault, if necessary, against the town. On the night of October 11, covered by the devastating artillery barrage, French and American soldiers went to work, every man with "a shovel, spade, or grubbing hoe," and by daylight on the 12th they had an entrenchment 750 yards long, 3½ feet deep, and about 7 feet wide. This was the time in most sieges when the besieged would usually attack before the enemy could bring his artillery up to the new line. But British reaction was feeble, which disturbed Washington. "I shall think it strange, indeed," he wrote, "if Lord

Cornwallis makes no vigorous exertions in the course of this night, or very soon after." But Cornwallis was weaker than Washington realized. The bombardment was taking its toll, sickness was decimating his ranks, and he was running low on shells. "Last night the enemy made their second parallel at a distance of three hundred yards," he wrote Clinton. "We continue to lose men very fast." No mention was made of any assault plans.

The Allies spent the next few days bringing up their heavy cannon and strengthening the new line. To be effective, however, the line would have to go all the way to the river on Washington's right, and here it was blocked by the advanced British Redoubts Nos. 9 and 10 near the river. Redoubt No. 10, closest to the river, was a square fortification, and No. 9 a five-sided strong point. They would both have to be taken by assault. All day long on October 14 the guns blasted these two positions, the one held by about 120 British and Hessian troops, the other by about 70 British. Two detachments were selected for the assaults, one consisting of 400 French troops commanded by Col. William Deux Ponts to attack Redoubt No. 9, the other of 400 Americans led by Lt. Col. Alexander Hamilton to storm Redoubt No. 10. About dusk that evening, Washington appeared before the American detachment to stress the importance of the mission and to exhort the men to be firm and brave. "I thought then," a young officer later recalled, "that His Excellency's knees rather shook, but I have since doubted whether it was not mine."

Under cover of darkness and with perfect timing and execution, the American troops charged Redoubt No. 10, climbing over the obstructions in front rather than taking the time to tear them down. With bayonets fixed but muskets unloaded to prevent a premature warning shot, the Americans engaged the British in a brief but brisk hand-to-hand fight. In about 15 minutes it was over. Surprised and outnumbered, the British were forced to surrender the redoubt; the Americans suffered only 9 killed and about 31 wounded in the action. It was the same story at Redoubt No. 9 on the left of the Americans, although the French suffered heavier casualties (15 killed, 77 wounded) because, unlike Hamilton's force, they stopped to tear down the obstructions and thus exposed themselves to enemy fire for a longer period.

A heavy rain set in as the soldiers labored through the night in the mud to connect the two new fortifications with the second siege line. And in his general orders for the day, Washington wrote: "The General reflects with the highest degree of pleasure on the confidence which the troops of the two nations must hereafter have in each other. Assured of moral support, he is convinced there is no danger which they will not cheerfully encounter —no difficulty which they will not bravely overcome."

The Allies expected a counterattack, but it never came. Cornwallis, viewing the new Allied line, the destruction of his fortifications and guns, and the increasing number of sick and wounded all around him, knew the end was near. "My situation now becomes very critical," he wrote Clinton, "we dare not show a gun to their old batteries, and I expect that their new ones will open to-morrow morning . . . . The safety of the place is, therefore, so precarious that I cannot recommend that the fleet and army should run any great risk endeavoring to save us."

Despite the hopelessness of the situation, British custom and pride demanded some desperate gesture, some symbolic act of resistance, regardless of the lives it might cost. Consequently, at about 3 o'clock on the morning of October 16, a picked British force of 350 men charged out of the lines and surprised a French force in an unfinished battery position, where the French line met the American, temporarily driving them away and spiking the guns with bayonets. In a quick counterattack, however, the French troops regained the guns and the enemy retreated. Within a few hours the artillery was again serviceable. This useless effort at face-saving cost the British 8 killed and 12 captured; 20 Frenchmen and one American sergeant were also killed.

Cornwallis, now faced with the choice of attempting to flee or surrender, admitted "there was no part of the whole front attacked on which we could show a single gun, and our shells were nearly expended." In desperation he ordered all available boats assembled and under cover of darkness hoped to evacuate his troops to Gloucester and perhaps break through the weak Allied force there and escape northward to join Clinton. A violent windstorm came up, however, and scattered the boats, so the attempt had to be abandoned. As a British officer stated, "Thus expired the last hope of the British army."

The Allied guns had been relatively quiet that night as the men labored on new batteries and works in the second line. But early the next morning they opened fire again with a terrifying roar. "The whole peninsula trembles under the incessant thunderings of our infernal machines," an observer noted. "We are so near as to have a distinct view of the dreadful havoc and destruction of their works, and even see the men in their lines tore to pieces by the bursting of our shells." In Yorktown a soldier stated that "One saw nothing but bombs and balls raining on the whole line."

At 10 a.m., October 17, a British drummer boy appeared dramatically on a parapet and "beat a parley." He was accompanied by an officer carrying a white cloth. Then a sudden silence settled like a gently restraining hand over the shell-pocked sandy plain.

The British officer was blindfolded and led through the Allied lines. The letter he carried from Cornwallis was quickly delivered to Washington. "Sir: I propose a cessation of hostilities for twenty-four hours, and that two officers may be appointed by each side to meet at Mr. [Augustine] Moore's house to settle terms for the surrender of the posts at York and Gloucester." After reading it Washington told his aides that it had come "at an earlier period than my most sanguine hopes had induced me to expect." He did not, however, like the request for a 24-hour ceasefire. It might be a ruse to stall for time to allow aid to come from Clinton. So he changed it to 2 hours. Cornwallis then rushed back preliminary proposals which showed, Washington believed, that "there would be no great difficulty in fixing the terms." So at about 5 o'clock that afternoon hostilities were suspended.

That evening a "solemn stillness prevailed," an American officer noted, "and the night was remarkably clear & the sky decorated with ten thousand stars—numberless Meteors gleaming thro' the Atmosphere afforded a pleasing resemblance to the Bombs which had exhibited a noble Firework the night before, but happily divested of all their Horror." With the dawn came the wailing of Scottish bagpipes from the shattered British fortifications, to be answered by a gay tune from a French regimental band. Curious Americans and French crowded atop parapets to view equally curious British and Germans staring back at them from Yorktown. The awful destruction wrought by the Allied guns could be plainly seen, with few houses still standing and those badly damaged. On the beach along the river the officer saw "hundreds of busy people . . . moving to & fro." In the river lay "ships sunk down to the Waters Edge" and "further out in the Channel the Masts, Yards & even the top gallant Masts of some might be seen, without any vestige of the hulls."

On the afternoon of October 18, the four peace commissioners—Lt. Col. Thomas Dundas and Maj. Alexander Ross representing the British, and Lt. Col. John Laurens and the Viscount de Noailles (Lafayette's brother-in-law) the Allies—met in Augustine Moore's impressive frame house on the bank of the river about a mile southeast of Yorktown behind the Allied lines. Most of the surrender terms were agreed upon easily enough, but one, upon which Washington insisted, caused heated debate that lasted well into the night. The British requested the usual "honors of war," which meant the privilege of marching out bearing weapons, with flags flying, and bands playing one of the victor's tunes to honor him. This would signify that there was no disgrace or dishonor involved—just a case of the better man having won. But the year before, when General Lincoln had surrendered to the British after being besieged in Charleston, he had not been accorded these honors. Consequently, Washington would not now

allow them to the British. Cornwallis, despite his chagrin and embarrassment, had no choice but to accept what he regarded as "harsh" terms. The next morning the articles, bearing the signatures of Cornwallis and Capt. Thomas Symonds, the chief British naval officer present, were returned to Washington in captured Redoubt No. 10 where he, Rochambeau, and de Barras signed them. And Washington added a line: "Done in the trenches before York Town in Virginia, October 19, 1781."

One of the terms specified that "The Garrision of York will march out to a place to be appointed in front of the posts at 2 °Clock precisely, with Shouldered Arms. Colours cased and Drums beating a British or German March.—they are then to ground their Arms, & return to their Encampment, where they will remain untill [sic] they are dispatched to the place of their Destination." Before the appointed hour the Allied Army was drawn up in two lines that extended about a mile on both sides of the road to Hampton, the French on the right (west) and the Americans on the left. It was a clear and pleasant autumn day with just a nip in the air to remind one of the coming of winter. The bright sun reflected off the white French uniforms, bordered with varied colors, the officers elegant in plumes and fancy decorations. Across the road the ragged and tattered Americans appeared in sharp contrast to this military splendor. "The French troops," an American observed, "in complete uniform, displayed a martial and noble appearance . . . . The Americans, though not all in uniform nor their dress so neat, yet exhibitied an erect soldierly air, and every countenance beamed with satisfaction and joy . . . but universal silence and order prevailed."

It was a solemn occasion and while they waited for the British a certain nervousness appeared in the ranks after the bands stopped playing. And yet the event was not totally without humor. Admiral de Barras, more at ease on the bridge of a ship than on the back of a horse, had trouble with his mount. "It is true," a Frenchman wrote, that "when his horse stretched to vent himself, he cried, 'Good heavens! I believe my horse is sinking.' "

Shortly after 2 p.m. the head of the British column appeared on the outskirts of the ruined town. The soldiers were resplendent in new dress uniforms just issued, with shouldered arms and colors cased, drums beating a slow, melancholy English tune, "The World Turned Upside Down." As they marched slowly through the Allied lines a New Jersey officer noted that the "officers in general behaved like boys who had been whipped at school. Some bit their lips; some pouted; others cried. Their round, broad-brimmed hats were well-adapted to the occasion, hiding those faces they were ashamed to show." A Pennsylvania officer thought that "The British prisoners appeared much in liquor."

At their head rode an impressive-looking Irishman, Gen. Charles O'Hara, second in command. Pleading illness, Lord Cornwallis avoided the mortification and the humiliation of a surrender ceremony. O'Hara first tried to surrender to the French, but was politely referred to Washington. Washington, however, refused to accept the sword from a second in command. Instead, he referred him to his second in command, General Lincoln. Lincoln accepted O'Hara's sword in token of surrender and then returned it, as was the custom. He directed the British general to an open field on the right, surrounded by French troops, where the prisoners were to lay down their arms before returning to their camps in town. A British officer wrote that "the mortification and unfeigned sorrow of the soldiers will never fade from my memory. Some went so far as to shed tears," but he also admitted that "the Americans behaved with great delicacy and forebearance." Altogether somewhere between 6,000 and 7,000 men were surrendered. During the siege the British had suffered approximately 482 casualties in killed and wounded, the Allies 262. (Ironically, Clinton sailed from New York that day with the needed supplies and reinforcements and arrived off the Virginia coast on October 24. Upon learning of the surrender, however, he sailed back to New York.)

In Yorktown, following the surrender ceremony, an American noticed that the British officers seemed to have temporarily lost control of their men. "Much confusion and riot among the British through the day; many of the soldiers were intoxicated; several attempts . . . to break open stores . . . our patrols kept busy." A French officer was shocked at the condition of the little town: "One could not walk three steps without finding big holes made by bombs, cannon balls, and splinters, and barely covered graves and the arms and legs of blacks and whites were scattered here and there. Most of the houses were riddled with cannon balls."

That night, the Americans celebrated uproariously. According to one observer, "the officers and soldiers could scarcely talk for laughing; and they could scarcely walk for jumping, and dancing and singing as they went about." As news of the victory spread in the ensuing weeks, a newspaper reported it was celebrated "in various expressions of thankfullness and joy, by almost every town and society in the thirteen United States." But when it reached England, Lord North, the Prime Minister, exclaimed in anguish: "Oh God! it is all over."

And so it was. As Lafayette wrote, "After this attempt, what English general will undertake the conquest of America?" Although it would be another 2 years before the peace treaty would be signed in Paris and the last British troops would leave, and despite the various skirmishes that took place later, the War for American Independence was over for all practical

purposes. Cornwallis' surrender toppled the British Government and forced it to sue for peace. "It will not be believed," Washington wrote after the treaty was signed, "that such a force as Great Britain has employed for eight years in this country could be baffled in the plan of subjugating it, by numbers infinitely less, composed of men oftentimes half starved, always in rags, without pay, and experiencing every species of distress which human nature is capable of undergoing." A new member had joined the family of nations, and if its citizens were not "completely free and happy, the fault will be entirely their own."

EPILOGUE

The Americans had won, and they had won more than a war and national independence. They could not know it at the time, but they were the instrument by which the great principle that *people* make governments was realized and the instrument by which the traditional belief in the divine right of kings was repudiated. The effects were felt worldwide and they are still being felt today. As a young, far-sighted French officer observed: "I felt that the American Revolution marked the beginning of a new political era; that this Revolution would necessarily set in motion important progressive currents in our general civilization, and that it would before long occasion great changes in the social order then existing in Europe."

With its concept of government by the consent of the governed, the Revolution was quickly accepted worldwide. And the constitutional process, which was its end product, has endured longer than any other written constitution in the modern world. Abraham Lincoln perhaps put it all in proper focus when he stated so succinctly: "I have often inquired of myself what great principle or idea it was that kept this Confederacy so long together. It was not the mere matter of the separation of the Colonies from the motherland; but that sentiment in the Declaration of Independence which gave liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but, I hope, to the world, for all future time. It was that which gave promise that in due time the weight would be lifted from the shoulders of all men."

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Inside cover: Detail from Louis-Nicholis van Blarenberghe's *Surrender of Yorktown,* painted in 1785. *Musée de Versailles.*

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